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U.S., After 11 Weeks, Nears End Of Evidence in a Navy Spy Trial

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SAN FRANCISCO, June 11 — Eleven and a half weeks after they began, prosecutors in the espionage and tax fraud trial of Jerry A. Whitworth moved toward completing the presentation of their case today.

The jury has heard more than 130 witnesses so far in the case against a man the Government contends is responsible for the loss of some of the Navy's most important communications secrets.

Mr. Whitworth, 46 years old, is accused of stealing secret Navy cryptographic data and encoded messages from various duty stations while he served as a Navy radioman and passing them to a Soviet spy ring for more than a decade beginning in 1975. If convicted, he could be sentenced to seven life terms plus 27 years and fined a total of \$530,000.

Mr. Whitworth has pleaded not guilty to all the charges. He has been held without bail since his arrest in June 1985.

His former Navy colleague, John A. Walker Jr., has acknowledged heading the spy ring of which Mr. Whitworth is accused of being a member. Mr. Walker has admitted being the only member of the ring to meet with Soviet agents and actually pass classified military data to them.

Author Testifies on Spying

The Government nevertheless asserts that Mr. Whitworth's role was the most damaging to military security because of the importance of the data the prosecutors say he stole.

The prosecution today presented the testimony of John D. Barron, a senior editor for Reader's Digest magazine in Washington, who is the author of two books on the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence agency.

Mr. Barron's testimony on how the K.G.B. functions in recruiting and handling American agents was offered to corroborate the testimony of Mr. Walker as to how he began his career as a Soviet spy.

Under questioning from Assistant United States Attorney William S. Farmer, Mr. Barron said that the K.G.B. normally avoided face-to-face meetings with its American agents, using secret sites where stolen data could be left and cash payments and instructions picked up.

He said that cryptographic data were "of extraordinary importance" to the K.G.B. and that they would use cash payments for such material as "an instrument to control or train the agent."

Prosecutors have presented extensive documentary evidence seized by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in searches of the residences of both Mr. Whitworth and Mr. Walker, as well as material left by Mr. Walker at a site in Maryland for his Soviet contact, linking the two men and others to the theft of Navy data.

Life Term for Ring Member

Mr. Walker pleaded guilty to espionage charges last October along with his son, Michael L. Walker, who was a sailor, and is awaiting sentencing. John Walker's older brother, Arthur J. Walker, a retired Navy lieutenant commander, was convicted last August of stealing classified military documents from the military contractor for whom he worked and has been sentenced to life in prison.

Among the documents seized was a classified Navy wartime contingency plan for the Middle East and notes made by Mr. Walker after meeting with his Soviet contact in Vienna, showing that Soviet agents had assigned the code letter D to Mr. Whitworth.

The F.B.I.'s investigation was significantly bolstered by a simultaneous investigation by agents of the Internal Revenue Service, who spent a year tracing every financial transaction they could that had been made by Mr. Whitworth and his wife, Brenda L. Reis, since their marriage in 1976. The investigation was aimed at proving that Mr. Whitworth had large amounts of unearned cash that could have come from the sale of Navy data and to prove the five counts of tax fraud.

Mr. Walker testified that Mr. Whitworth received payments totaling \$332,000 from him in exchange for the stolen data. Revenue agents said they found that the couple used nearly \$152,000 more in cash than could be accounted for from the declared income of Mr. Whitworth and his wife, who is not charged in the case.

The defense is scheduled to begin its case Monday. The defense attorneys, James Larson and Tony Tamburello, have declined to say whether Mr. Whitworth would take the stand. They have said that they will present evidence as to Mr. Whitworth's "state of mind," indicating that they might not attempt to prove Mr. Whitworth did not take the data, but rather that he did not intend for it to be passed to the Soviet Union or to harm the United States, as is charged in the indictment.